

All this change is lauded by Gardner. How do his econometric models explain the growth and higher incomes of contemporary farmers? At first glance three factors seem to play a prominent role: all-encompassing technology; the commercialization of markets; and government intervention. The government was involved in agriculture from the birth of the republic. Much of this intervention—infrastructure that built dams, regulations that controlled packing plants, and information from experiment stations—benefited farmers. At the same time, Gardner questions the role of commodity programs, which some consider the government's most significant contribution to agriculture in the twentieth century. Although commodity supports helped even out fluctuating prices, Gardner argues that they were inefficient and a drag on the growth curve. He maintains that the single most important factor in contemporary farm growth and incomes was the integration of farm people into the nonfarm economy, through off-farm work.

An econometric *tour de force*, this book is unfortunately heavy going for historians. To close, two Iowa references are worth mentioning. First, readers will be intrigued that immersed in the equations, charts, and graphs is a discussion of farming in Cedar County. Second, although the author maintains that the Hart-Parr Company built tractors in Iowa City, in fact it was Charles City.

Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed, edited by Jane Adams. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. vi, 338 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

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Eighty years ago most Iowa townships had about 30 families making a living off the land. Farming was diversified, and farmers produced their own seed and fertilized their fields with animal manure. Operators had minimal contact with the government, apart from agricultural agents. After 1930, agricultural industrialization gradually altered those patterns. Government programs multiplied, farms grew larger, small farmers quit, and science transformed daily lives. As late as 1980, Iowa had more than 80,000 farm families whose incomes were derived entirely from the land. But as Jane Adams shows, the downturn of the eighties accelerated earlier developments affecting the way agriculture was organized; genetic modification, integration, and the use of no-till techniques—to name some of the innovations—made agriculture unrecognizable in a short time.

Fighting for the Farm serves several useful functions. The essays underline the scope and sophistication of social science research about rural America in the past 20 years, which stresses the political implications of change, especially the connection between the state and agriculture. The essays also explore the consequences of state intervention and the impact of environmental organizations on agriculture. Coverage is wide-ranging, with chapters on California and Canada included. On the downside, however, most of the essays are cluttered with jargon and laced with heavy doses of theory, making the volume inaccessible to lay readers and probably to most historians.

Four essays are particularly useful for anyone interested in Iowa agriculture: Jess Gilbert's treatment of Depression-era farm programs; J. Sanford Rikoon's chapter on corporate swine production in Missouri; Kathryn Dudley's discussion of the impact of farm loss in Minnesota; and Barry J. Barnett's analysis of the farm financial crisis of the 1980s. Gilbert's "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal" resurrects the innovative concepts introduced by two Iowans, Henry A. Wallace and M. L. Wilson, in the so-called Third New Deal. Earlier New Deal programs relied on large "undemocratic" bureaucratic structures. Especially in the South such programs overturned rural society. After 1938 Wallace and Wilson ensured that community-based organizations would play a vital role in introducing conservation measures. In other words, conservation planning would be based on watersheds, with farmer committees in charge not only of administration but of research as well. Thus, in contrast to the "High Modernism" of the AAA crop programs, conservation initiatives were characterized by the "low modernism" of "democratic" local representation. The architects desired a kind of Jeffersonian political structure that they remembered from the Iowa townships of their youth. Unfortunately, the big government programs of the war years had destroyed their ideal.

The remaining chapters of note deal with very recent changes in agriculture. Rikoon analyzes the Missouri experience with corporate integrated hog operations. As in Iowa, "corporate" farming was outlawed. However, in the interest of economic development, certain marginal counties were designated as "corporate"-friendly localities, and large outside entities were recruited to set up operations. Predictably, the outcome was disastrous: the local population was quickly alienated, little economic development took place, and environmental concerns mounted. Eventually, the corporate bosses grew weary of opposition and moved to Texas. Although that result seemed a victory for family farm operators in states such as Missouri and Iowa, the realities of global hog production, where "footloose" corporations could

set up cutthroat competition in any friendly locale, meant that it was a pyrrhic victory.

Barnett's useful summary of the causes of the economic downturn emphasizes the worldwide causes and effects of the slump. He also underscores the failure of agricultural economists to understand the political and historical realities of the era because of their emphasis on microeconomic analysis. Dudley's essay, which is adapted from an earlier published book, tries to help readers understand the consequences of the rapid transformation of agriculture through the human drama of the loss of the farm. She found that rather than blame agricultural economists, the government, or bankers, her western Minnesota farm families preferred to shoulder the responsibility of their actions themselves. Family farmers, whatever their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or management orientation, were entrepreneurs. The ethic of "the entrepreneurial self" channeled these individuals inwards. Thus, contrary to the contemporary media emphasis on farmer solidarity, the image Dudley portrays is one of lonely individualism. Anyone who witnessed the 1980s farm crisis firsthand might disagree with such an assessment. However, Dudley's work is relevant to the Iowa farm experience, and, compared to most chapters in this volume, is fresh and readable.

Across This Land: A Regional Geography of the United States and Canada, by John C. Hudson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xxi, 474 pp. Illustrations, index. \$29.95 paper.

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John Hudson brings to the study of North America an elegantly written and concise regional geography. He begins with the premise that developments in the social sciences have estranged physical geography and human culture and diminished the value of regional geography. The point of this book is to recapture the importance of regional geography for weaving together a comprehensive understanding of North America. His methodology is also rooted in a belief that detailed knowledge of subregions, down to microcosmic levels, does not necessarily obscure the whole, but rather makes it more accurate and comprehensible.

The book's 27 chapters knit together seamlessly all of the varied elements of good geography—most importantly the interaction of geology and topography with the history of interaction between humans and the environment. Hudson has taken the five major themes of geography developed by the National Geographic Society—commonly

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